

Zephaniah 3:9-12; II Kings 11:1-13; Finding a Hiding Place in Him I. The Conquest Reversed II. The Nations Converted III. The Israelites Restored

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, where do you go when a strong storm is coming? When you hear the warning sirens- where do you turn? You normally go inside- you find shelter in a strong hiding place until the storm is past. Today we come to the prophet Zephaniah- which is once again a lesser known prophet. The message of this book is similar to many we have considered- specifically the coming Day of the LORD. But the focus is a little different this week- as we look at how the nations will also enjoy the blessings of finding salvation in the God of Israel. The name- Zephaniah- means “the LORD protects” or hides. The image is one of safety in the midst of great trouble and calamity. As our book opens, we find that Zephaniah wrote in the days of Josiah the king of Judah. So we find ourselves around 640 BC- during the early reign of the righteous, child king named Josiah- the king who was hidden as an infant as we read in II Kings 11. It would be this child turned king at 8 years old who would enact many of the reformation that Zephaniah would call for- but what a righteous king and prophet cannot do is change the hearts of the people. Although there is a temporary reformation and repentance during the reign of Josiah- judgement is still coming! As we learned when reading both Jonah and Nahum- a temporary and superficial repentance are still followed by the promised destruction. So today we find a message of both judgement and hope- of justice and love in the prophet Zephaniah. With this theme; Jesus Christ reveals the hope and joy of those who hide themselves in the LORD.

I. The Conquest Reversed

In our first point we find that the Israelite people of that time had failed to be what they were called to become. A pressing question for the church of all ages is this- is the church more like the world than she is a light to the nations? Was Israel living like a city on a hill- or had she become just like the nations that she had been commissioned to displace? The paganizing of the Israelites is evident in her worship. She had become syncretized- she had embraced a religion that gave lip service to the LORD as well as the gods of the nations. In 1:4- she was idolatrous- serving at the house of Baal. And again in 1:5- bowing down and

swearing by the LORD and swearing by Milcom. They people of Israel were like those in the days of Elijah- limping back and forth between idolatry and empty, formalistic worship of the LORD. She served the hosts of the heavens- bowing down to the stary hosts. Even becoming superstition in her ways. 1:9 says that she leaps over the threshold. Think back to what I Sam. 5:4 said- that is when the idol of Dagon fell down before the ark of the Covenant- and the hands of Dagon the fish god were broken off an were found laying on the threshold. So the Philistines no longer stepped on any threshold- it became bad luck. Now we find this practice in the camps of Israel! Idolatrous and superstitious- emulating the nations in all her ways. I wonder how the church of today looks more like the world than the holy people of God? I wonder how many have become superstitious- or how our religion is based more on tradition than understanding and truth? We go through the motions- but is our heart engaged? Do we look more like the world during the week than we look like a holy people- a royal priesthood? But the Israelites were also wicked in their leadership. She was polluted in her offices. (Read 3:3-4) In 3:3- the officials are roaring lions who devour and consume- leaving nothing left. So the rulers were not only unjust- they were malicious in their cruelty as they devoured the poor and consumed the widows. They did not seek justice nor do mercy! (3:4) Her prophets- called to be messengers of the truth- well these men were treacherous. Always giving people the “words” they want to hear- for a price telling them any message they long for. They did not feel obligated to speak the truth- but treated their office as if it was insignificant and light- something they could trifle with! And finally- her priests. They profane what is holy- doing violence to the Law. Instead of teaching the law, offering sacrifices and setting an example of holiness, they were burying the law under the rubble of profanity and violence. They disobeyed God’s Law and taught others to do the same- giving the enemies of God an opportunity to despise the LORD- because His people were so wicked. Note that the 3 offices are here found- fully polluted and disregarded! We can be thankful that we have the perfect Christ- our Messiah leading us- because the people back then were led by wicked shepherds! They were not a kingdom of priest- a holy nation- but rather a polluted and rebellious bunch of hypocrites. They were rebellious in their thoughts of God- thinking that He did not see and would not act. But the LORD God does see- and He will act! Remember that the

Israelites were promised this land because of God's covenant with Abraham. God had used Israel as an instrument of justice- to push out the pagan Canaanites. They Israelites were promised a land flowing with milk and honey- as Dt. 6:11 says- to possess homes they did not build and vineyards they did not plant. But now- the Israelites were just as bad as the pagan Canaanites who were before them. Just as the LORD had given this land to them- He could take it away. In fact, there is a reverse conquest of sorts that takes place in 1:13. You who plundered the nations- who received the land and vineyards as gracious inheritance- because of your rebellion- you will be plundered- your homes laid waist- and you will not enjoy the fruit of your vineyards. What I gave you, I will take away and give to another- because you have desecrated my name. The people will dispossess the land of their forefathers. But all is not lost! Although it may be too late for the nation- judgment at the hand of Babylon is now certain- there is still hope for you! There is still time for you to save your soul- and to flee the coming wrath. As 2:3 puts it- seek the Lord; all you humble of the land. Seek righteousness- seek humility- and you may be hidden on the day of the LORD. Although the nation's down fall is now certain- only a matter of time- there is still hope for some! There is a holy remnant that can hide- take shelter from the coming storm! So humble yourself- not to save your nation- but to save your soul from the day of destruction!

II. The Nations Converted

And this deliverance is what we now see. In the last two points we will see the nations gathered-and also the Israelites restored. Although both the Israelites and the nations will be judged- there are those from both the nations and the Israelites that will be saved! An elect remnant if you will. As we read in 3:9- a time is coming when the speech of the people will be purified- so that they may call on the name of the Lord. From beyond Cush- the nation of Ethiopia in Africa- or we could say from Egypt to Syria- even Babylon to Rome- from the ends of the earth- a people will be gathered- these will obey in word and in deed. Or as Col. 3:17 puts it- whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. A time is coming when a people will be gathered- a remnant from the nations. What happens in world history is that Christ will have His people- the King must have his citizens. As we confess in LD 21, Christ gathers His

people from the beginning of the world to the end out of the entire human race. There is always a few- and indeed a growing number- of people on the earth who know, call upon, believe and obey the One True God! It is the work of Jesus by His Spirit to gather the elect exiles- and that means that the nations will be gathered! Or a Rev. 7:9 puts it, a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language stood before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white and waving palm branches- saying- salvation belongs to our God! It is these humble people who find refuge in Him -3:12- who will graze in green pastures and beside quiet waters- and none shall make them afraid! So although mighty nations will fall- and the proud will be cast down- it is the humble who will be exalted- and the lowly who find refuge in the shelter of our LORD! The LORD hides these ones under His wing until the storm is past.

III. The Israelites Restored

But there is one more area to consider- and that is the restoration of Israel. Not only the nations- but God's own people will once more be restored! As we have seen in most of our Minor Prophets, Zephaniah ends on a high note of a promised restoration and resulting joy. There are three main promises found here. The first is found in 3:15 - this is the promise of the removal of judgement- and that her enemies will be cleared away. Again in v. 19- I will deal with your oppressors. The second promise is in 3:18- where the lost will be gathered- and again in 20- they will be brought in and gathered so that their fortunes might be restored. A time is coming when the remnant of Israel will return from captivity- brought back to the promised land- and she will be blessed with prosperity and peace in the land once again. And the third promise is found in v. 17- I will be in your midst- I will be the one on saves- and I will rejoice over you and quiet you by my love. This is a very striking and stirring picture of the LORD'S love for His people. He will hush His crying people with a tender love song- binding their wounds an carrying their sick. The image of God singing- even rejoicing over us has always fascinated me! That He would take joy in the creatures He has saved- dwelling with them! As we read in Rev. 21:3- God will dwell with man- and they will be He people- and He will be their God- wiping away all their tears. Or as we read in 3:19- I will save the lame and gather the outcast! He comes- healing their diseases- gathering the straying sheep. A picture of the Good Shepherd and His work in

Israel- and a foretaste of what is yet to come! Now this love song of the LORD is a wonderful reminder of what God is going to do- what He is doing even today. When thinking of these last two points- the conversion of the nations and the restoration of Israel- a certain NT teaching concerning election comes to mind- specifically Rom. 11:11-16.

Here in Rom. 11 we have an expansion of this truth revealed way back in Zephaniah. First of all, the nation of Israel will be judged for her rejection of Jesus and the refusal to accept the gospel. It would be by their refusal to believe that the gospel would go out to the nations as we saw in our 2nd point. The nations would hear and repent- causing the Jews to become jealous- and one day the Israelites will be re-grafted into Christ and in this way- all Israel will be saved as our 3rd point teaches. Although it is true that not all Israel is of Israel- not all those who are descendants of Abraham are joined to Jesus by faith as Abraham was- it is also true that God will save His elect- and that the elect remnant including many from Israel- will be saved!

To conclude, in Zephaniah we not only find a reversal in the casting out of the Israelites who rebelled- we also find a reversal in that God saves some from the very people who had been cast out! Jesus Christ reveals the hope and joy of those who hide themselves in the LORD. It is a mysterious truth -that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble- that He raises up the poor- and gives shelter to those who hide under His wing! Let us learn that there is only one source of lasting hope- only one way in which we too can flee the coming wrath- flee from the coming storm of His righteous indignation- by hiding in our God's shelter! Or we could say- God hides us from His own justice when He gives us forgiveness through His Son! In this way our God uphold His own resurrection principle- He consigned all to disobedience so that He might have mercy on all- that's from Rom. 11 as well. Knowing that we have all fallen into sin- and that God delights to rescue- that Jesus hides His people from the storm- is what moves us to joy! It is for that reason that we can rejoice and exalt with our hearts- because God has cleared away our enemies and have take away judgment which was against us!